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RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 3079
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 3281
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 5064
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C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 003152

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WHA/AND FOR SHELBY SMITH-WILSON

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TAGS: [ETRD](#) [ETTC](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [CU](#) [BL](#)
SUBJECT: BOLIVIA-CUBAN RELATIONS: REVIEW FOR LIBERTAD ACT

REF: STATE 158768

Classified By: EcoPol Chief Mike Hammer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (U) The following responses are keyed to the questions in ref A:

--Bolivian Investment: Bolivia has no significant investments in Cuba.

12. (U) Bilateral Trade Agreements: Bolivia and Cuba signed a limited Economic Cooperation Agreement in May 1995. The accord offers preferential tariff treatment to specified goods from each country but has not generated significant increases in bilateral trade. The GOB signed a "People's Trade Agreement" with Cuba and Venezuela in April 2006 in Havana and became party to a largely symbolic pact meant to advance economic, political, and cultural integration. GOB statistics indicate Bolivian exports to Cuba totaled only \$500 in 2006 and have only reached approximately \$100 in 2007 thus far. According to GOB sources, this \$100 was food goods, namely cooking oil and chocolate bonbons.

--Bolivian and Cuban officials met in La Paz November 21 to sign a "Complementary Economic Agreement" to boost commercial relations. The agreement calls for duty-free buying and selling of goods between the two countries and fits under the People's Trade Agreement (ALBA-TCP.) According to press reports, Cuban Foreign Trade Vice-Minister Pedro plans to expand trade between Cuba and Bolivia, particularly in the food and clothing sectors. Bolivian Minister of Production and Micro-Management Celinda Sosa is on board with the agreement, and said that both Cuban and Bolivian firms have attended each other's trade fairs.

--Bolivian President Evo Morales announced on October 25 that he would rely heavily on support from Cuba and Venezuela to launch a state-run airline, Boliviana de Avacion (BOA.) He said it would better help the communication between the ALBA-TCP countries, though didn't specify when the new airline would be launched.

--A November 29-30 conference in Havana with ALBA countries set the groundwork for establishment of a super-national telecommunications company. The project called "Grand Nation" is aimed at improving telephone services, development of communication networks, and integration of communication between ALBA members and is planned for a January 2008 launch.

¶3. (C) Exchange Programs: Cuba offers limited scholarships to Bolivian students seeking to study at Cuban universities.

--Cuba paid for several dozen Bolivians to travel to Cuba for eye surgeries and other medical treatment and has sent an estimated 2,000 medical personnel to Bolivia, of which 1,400 claim to be doctors (ref B). It is difficult to verify claims of patients treated, particularly since official estimates vary wildly and sometimes contradict each other. President Morales claimed in May about 12,000 Bolivians had benefited from Cuban surgeries. The Cuban embassy claimed the program provided medical consultations for 8 million Bolivians as of November (Note: The entire population of Bolivia is just over 9 million. End Note.), 5 million in 2007 alone, and saved more than 9,000 patients' lives. The Cuban Embassy claims support of 33 hospitals and ophthalmology centers throughout all nine Bolivian departments and promises to support at least 10 additional hospitals. The Cubans also claim to have performed 130,000 eye operations for Bolivians as of October. (See also para 7 and 8.)

--Cuba also helped launch a literacy campaign in March 2006. With its 110 claimed advisors, Cuba pledges to eradicate illiteracy in Bolivia by September 2008. Cuban Ambassador Rafael Dausa claimed as of November 27 the program had taught 400,000 Bolivians to read. Venezuela contributes logistical aid and audiovisual equipment to distribute the Cuban "Yes I Can" literacy program material.

¶4. (U) Promotion Of Democracy/Human Rights in Cuba: Bolivia has not worked to promote the advancement of democracy and human rights in Cuba. The Bolivian Government is increasingly aligned with the Cuban government and is not likely to make public statements supportive of civil society or critical of human rights abuses. The GOB is unlikely to take actions which could be perceived as subversive by the Cuban government. (See also para 6.)

¶5. (U) High Level Visits (last six months): President Morales visited Cuba June 5 to met with interim leader Raul Castro and other top officials in a unannounced visit. Although international reporters were not given access to the arrival or meetings. Morales apparently visited only briefly with an ill Fidel Castro.

--Cuban and Bolivian legislators met in Havana November 9 to discuss "consolidating relations and stimulating bilateral socio-economic development." Though the Bolivian delegations was heavily represented by Senadors and Deputies from the ruling MAS party, opposition PODEMOS and UN party legislators also attended.

--Cuban Vice-President Carlos Lage joined President Morales and Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez at an Indigenous gathering in the Chapare October 12, an event replete with anti-American rhetoric. Morales reminded the crowd that many other presidents such as Castro, Chavez, and Kirschner support him and that "we are not alone, are not interested in the United States."

--Cuban comrades of Che Guevara (including Division Commander General Rogelio Acevedo) and the Cuban Ambassador were on hand to pay homage during an October 8 event honoring the 40th anniversary of Che's death in the town of Vallegrande, close to the spot Che was captured by Bolivian troops in ¶1967. They were also named "distinguished sons" of Camiri, a town about 100 kilometers from Vallegrande, in conjunction with the 5th Congress of Solidarity with Cuba October 6 and ¶7. Morales honored the Cuban veterans at an October 9 press conference. Morales stated the Bolivian troops that captured

Che in 1967 were "instruments of the empire" and discounted their right to an augmented pension, questioning their patriotism versus their greed. Although he allowed that Bolivian "so-called ex-combatants" had a right to honor the 55 troops that died fighting Che, he described these troops as "misdirected." He rhetorically asked why the troops did not fight U.S. troops instead of Che's band.

Recent Developments and Background

¶6. (C) Cuban Ambassador Rafael Dausa accompanies President Morales and other high-ranking officials frequently at events and on trips, particularly to visit Cuban medical and literacy assistance programs. Dausa chimed in September 12, maintaining that Cuba, Venezuela, and Bolivia are an "axis of peace" that rejects the U.S. "imperial mandates," which is why the U.S. stigmatizes them for decisions such as seeking diplomatic relations with Iran. MAS Senator Gaston Cornejo projected on September 26 a deep relationship between nations of "an alternative block (of countries) against the U.S. with great reserves of non-renewable natural resources." The Bolivian Senate Foreign Relations Committee member envisioned the "circle of countries" to include Bolivia, Iran, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Cuba.

Cuban Docs with Happy Feat

¶7. (C) At least ten Cuban doctors have successfully traveled to the United States under the Significant Public Benefit Protocol (SPBP). On June 14, Cuban doctor Ruben Rodriguez Cruz was detained by Bolivian immigration authorities in Santa Cruz after boarding an American Airlines flight bound for Miami. Dr. Rodriguez Cruz eventually managed to leave the airport and found a "safe place" to avoid Bolivian authorities. This is the first case of a Cuban doctor being detained upon departure. It is not clear at this time if the GOB has adopted a policy of blocking Cuban doctors from traveling to the United States.

Underequipped Cubans Better than No Docs

¶8. (C) Based on media reports, contacts, and experience of some of our own EmbOffs, it appears the quality of Cuban medical personnel is probably a welcome improvement for residents in isolated rural areas. However, the quality of the care they can provide is highly restricted by their access to basic medical supplies and equipment. An EmbOff was treated by Cuban doctors in November at a clinic near Lake Titicaca. She found the treatment to be adequate and feared she would not have otherwise received medical attention due to the remote location. Hundreds of patients were lined up at the clinic. Another EmbOff, accompanying a group of U.S. and Canadian doctors, heard complaints from local residents who compared that Cuban medical services, while appreciated, were severely lacking in comparison and referred many of them to city hospitals due to lack of equipment. An EmbOff spouse who works in a Bolivian hospital said a patient with a treatable condition was turned away by Cuban doctors as a "lost cause" in El Alto because they either misdiagnosed the problem or did not have the medicine.

Comment

¶9. (C) There is a disconnect between the prominent role Cuba would like to play in Bolivia and the meager resources it commands. This requires the Cubans to play a secondary role to Venezuela and, in some cases like the literacy program, ask for Venezuelan help to implement their own programs. An ideological tension has emerged between Cuba and Venezuela for the heart of Morales' government. Due to their vastly superior resources, Venezuelans wield more influence with Evo's inner circle. End Comment.

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